THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERWANI): (a) to (c) Yes Sir, India is deeply concerned over Pakistan's missile programme and its impact on the region's security. Government of India is committed to taking all necessary steps to safeguard to country's security and national interest in accordance with its own threat perceptions. Government closely monitors all developments including those relating to Pakistan's missile programme.

(d) The dialogue with Pakistan has been resumed at the Foreign Secretary level and, following the last round of discussions in Islamabad, a Joint Statement was issued which envisages discussions on "peace and security" issues. The substance and the modalities of these discussions will be elaborated at the next round of India-Pakistan Foreign Secretary level talks.

Liberalisation of Visa restrictions for Pak-stani and US Nationals

164. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have liberalised visa restrictions for Pakistani and the US nationals for visiting India;

(b) if so, what are the details of the liberalisation made;

(c) whether Government propose to liberalise visa restrictions for some other countries also; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA): (a) and (b) In pursuance of encouraging people to people contact and promoting greater interaction among scholars, intellectuals, journalists, writers, artistes, businessmen and others, Government have unilaterally eased the issuance of visas to Pakistani nationals.

Under the liberalised policy, Government have decided to

(i) permit Pakistani tourists to visit India in groups;

(ii) increase the maximum number of cities in India that Pakistani nationals can visit from 8 to 12, with a further relaxation possible for senior citizens;

(iii) designate the International airport at Chennai as an additional checkpoint for the arrival and departure of Pakistani nationals;

(iv) grant one year triple-entry visas to eligible Pakistani businessmen and permit them to enter and exit through different check-points wherever required;

(v) 'Exemptions from Police Reporting' visas can be granted to artistes, journalists, students, poets, writers, senior citizens, children, as well as to businessmen recommended by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce;

(vi) permit reputed artistes from Pakistan to give commercial performances in India; and

(vii) waive visa fees for senior Pakistani citizens, artistes, poets writers, students and journalists. A proposal for liberalisation in visa for US nationals, on reciprocity basis is, under Government's active consideration.

(c) and (d) Rationalisation and liberalisation of visa regime is an ongoing process.

Steps for Bettlement of Indo-Nepal relations

165. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether government have taken steps to establish better Indo-Nepal relations;